Probe Begins Into Charges FBI Destroyed Oswald Letter

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WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has begun a criminal investigation of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of a threatening letter delivered by Lee Harvey Oswald to the Dallas office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shortly before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The investigation, which is being conducted by lawyers in the department's criminal division, is said by authoritative sources to be focusing on "conflicting statements" given by present and former FBI agents and officials about their roles in — or knowledge of — the decision to destroy the letter following Kennedy's murder on November 22, 1963.

THE LETTER in question reportedly contained a threat by Oswald, the accused assassin of the late President, to "blow up" a Dallas police station unless the FBIceased its efforts to locate and interview him in Dallas and what he described as its harassment of his Russian-born wife, Marina.

According to several sources familiar with the results of a recently ordered administrative inquiry by the FBI into the incident, the Oswald letter made no mention of any intention on his part to commit a murder, or any animosity toward Kennedy.

The FBI's efforts to seek Oswald in the days before the assassination were prompted by its suspicion that, as a defector who had taken up residence in the Soviet Union, renounced his American citizenship and then returned to the United States married to a Russian native, his activities might prove to be of some security interest.

The threatening letter was delivered by Oswald to the FBI's Dallas field office in early November, 1963, after a special agent there, James P. Hosty Jr., had made two visits to a home where Oswald's wife, Marina, was staying with a friend.

DESPITE THE threatening language, the letter reportedly evoked no extraordinary effort on the part of the Dallas FBI office to locate Oswald, who had left the letter with an office receptionist in Hosty's name and then departed before it could be delivered.

The letter, the sources said, was simply made a part of Oswald's file. Hosty continued his efforts to locate Oswald, a former Marine rifleman, but they proved unavailing up to the time Kennedy was shot and killed while riding in a motorcade on a Dallas street.

Within days of the Kennedy assassination, sources said, the Oswald letter was removed from the file and destroyed. The chain of events that led to that destruction are the focus of the administrative inquiry now underway within the FBI.

CINTI Post. Sept 22, 1975

FBI Reported To Destroy Oswald Letter

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WASHINGTON — Top officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) — probably including former Director J. Edgar Hoover — ordered the destruction of a letter in which Lee Harvey Oswald, assassin of President Kennedy, conveyed violent threats about 10 days before he killed the President according to a source familiar with the meeting where this decision was made.

The source said that the decision to destroy the letter, which made threats against the Dallas police, was taken at a meeting of top FBI officials in Washington on the weekend after Kennedy was murdered in Dallas on Friday, November 22, 1963.

The FBI has always maintained that it had no reason to believe that Oswals was capable of violence and therefore had not filed reports on him with the Secret Service.

The source said that the decision to destroy the letter was made because of potential embarrassment to the FBI and not to hinder the investigation of President Kennedy's death.

The existence and destruction of the letter was first reported two weeks ago by the The Dallas Times-Herald.

The letter's destruction was cited by Senator Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.) as a prime reason for his introduction of a Senate resolution September 8, directing the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to inquire into Kennedy's murder as part of its investigation of the FBI and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The resolution is pending.

Schweiker said last week that since he introduced his resolution, his office received information that strengthened his belief that 17 still-secret reports from the FBI and 23 from the CIA to the Warren Commission might contain information that the public should have.

9/17/75 Cinti Enquirer